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AUTHOR Lule, Jack
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ABSTRACT

Dramatistic analysis suggests that the "New York Times" portrayals of the 1985 terrorist killing of Leon Klinghoffer, the 69 year old American tourist on the Achille Laurs, may contain a mythic dimension. Through the myth of the hero, the news stories invoked the symbol of the self, inviting intense identification of the individual reader with the terrorist victim. But in doing so, the news stories also provided the terror of terrorism. The news stories that drew from the myth of the hero, that invoked the symbol of the self in response to terrorism, helped the terrorists establish the link between the victim and the self. The symbolism of terrorism was also aided by the actions of public officials portrayed in the media. The victim was the terrorists' symbol of the nation, and was so honored by the media, and mourned by officials. Other political implications from news portrayals of the myth of the hero, and the mourning of the victim as a symbol of nation or community, might be suggested: (1) policy makers could appeal to the power of myth to arouse support for measures of prevention and reprisal; and (2) mythic images in the news might also help public officials create a powerful climate for revenge. (Two tables of data are included and 43 references are attached.) (RS)

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Terrorism and the News Media Research Project

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THE MYTH OF MY WIDOW: A DRAMATISTIC ANALYSIS OF NEWS PORTRAYALS OF A TERRORIST VICTIM

Terrorism and the News Media Research Project

THE MYTH OF MY WIDOW: A DRAMATISTIC ANALYSIS OF NEWS PORTRAYALS OF A TERRORIST VICTIM

Jack Lule
University of Tulsa

On October 7, 1985, on the Mediterranean Sea near Port Said, Egypt, four men hijacked the Achille Lauro, an Italian cruise ship, with 400 passengers and crew members aboard. The hijackers, identifying themselves as members of the Palestine Liberation Front, demanded the release of Palestinians imprisoned in several countries. They threatened to kill hostages if their demands were not met.

After two days of negotiations, the hijackers surrendered to Egyptian authorities. Soon after, Italian officials announced that an American tourist, Leon Klinghoffer, 69 years old and confined to a wheelchair, had been shot and his body thrown overboard during the hijacking. The United States demanded that the hijackers be prosecuted for the murder. On October 11, U.S. jets intercepted an Egyptian plane bound for Tunisia with the hijackers. The plane was forced to land at a NATO base in Italy, where the hijackers were charged with murder.

On October 14, a body washed ashore near the Syrian port of Tartus. On October 21, Leon Klinghoffer was buried in New Jersey.

For two weeks in October 1985, the Achille Lauro hijacking dominated U.S. news. It was a compelling news story with striking images and action. Four hundred people were held hostage. Powerful political actors engaged in international negotiations. The story bristled with gripping moves, from the daring hijacking and brutal murder, to the U.S. mid-air interception of a foreign jet.

Yet perhaps the most memorable image of the Achille Lauro hijacking was the face of Marilyn Klinghoffer. The widow of the victim received incredible international attention. She, rather than her husband, became the story. Reporters awaited her phone calls, in the Klinghoffers' New York apartment, with the couple's daughters, Lisa and Ilsa. Cameras followed Mrs. Klinghoffer as she left the Achille Lauro and as she arrived back in the United States. In the days after her arrival, news teams crowded the sidewalk outside her apartment. Her tears and faltering steps were recorded and replayed as she met her husband's body at Kennedy Airport. Her grief was broadcast worldwide on the day she buried him.

In the aftermath of the superabundance of news coverage, as the memory of the details of the hijacking fade but the power of the image of the widow remains, questions arise. How much coverage had the widow received? What was the nature of the coverage? Why was there such interest by the media in the Klinghoffer family, especially the widow? Why did the media probe most private moments of grief and mourning? Why was the story so compelling that the Klinghoffer family itself often willingly obliged the media? Why such terror and beauty in the story of the victim's widow? What can the stories say about terrorism and the news?

Some practical concerns of daily news can be acknowledged in partial explanation of the coverage of the widow and her family. Relatives are good sources for reporters. They have information about victims and often have had privileged contact with authorities. Relatives are convenient; they often are available to reporters; hijackers, hostages, and victims are not. Relatives can aid in "fleshing out" a story, giving human substance to unseen, far-off affairs, and providing deep, emotional content for complex, political stories.

Yet such pragmatic considerations pale beside the image of the widow and fail to capture or explain the intensity and real power of the news coverage. To suggest that Marilyn Klinghoffer was a good information source or supplied a feature angle does no justice to the drama and provides little understanding of the story. The news responded to the terrorist killing of Leon Klinghoffer with a number of stories about his widow. The dramatic nature of those stories may provide insight into the complex relationship of terrorism and the news.

Drama and Myth

The *drama* and the *story* must be emphasized. Although it is commonplace for news stories to refer to terrorist incidents as "dramas," the reflexive implication—that the news story about terrorism is drama—often is not fully captured in such language.

Perhaps no modern writer has developed the implications of drama as much as Kenneth Burke (1941, 1966). In many works, he explored the concept of dramatism, an understanding of man as a symbol-using animal who *acts* in the world on the basis of meanings that symbols hold for him. For Burke, man is the only organism capable of *action* rather than motion. In this sense, drama is not a metaphor for action but a real description of human action. "In this sense," Burke wrote (1976, p. 11), "man is defined literally as an animal characterized by his special aptitude for 'symbolic action,' which is itself a literal term. And from there on, drama is employed, not as a metaphor but as a fixed form that helps us discover what the implication of the terms 'act' and 'person' *really are*" (his emphasis).

With Burke's conception of dramatism, news can be studied as a symbolic act, the dramatic portrayal of a dramatic event. The study of news as drama, of course, was suggested in the writings of Walter Lippmann. News, Lippmann said (1922, p. 347), "is not a first hand report of the raw material. It is a report of that material after it has been stylized." News, he said (1922, p. 3), puts "pictures in our heads," simplified narratives that attempt to explain the complexities of events through drama. The philosopher George Herbert Mead also recognized the news as drama. "The vast importance of media of communication such as those involved in journalism is seen at once," he wrote (1934, p. 257), "since they report situations through which one can enter into the attitude and experience of other persons. *The drama* has served this function in presenting what have been felt to be important situations" (my emphasis).

Historically, though, the dramas of experience, the simplified narratives of events, have been myths. Perhaps therefore, insight into particular news stories, such as the coverage of the widow of a terrorist victim, can be aided through a comparison of news and myth. What is meant by myth? The comparison will require a dynamic conception of myth, different from popular usage which refers to "myth" as an ancient, incredible tale or a demonstrably false story opposed to "reality." A more dynamic notion sees myth as an integral, unifying aspect of all cultures, ancient and modern. Writers who have worked with this notion of myth include Freud (1959), Jung (1959), Cassirer (1946), and Malinowski (1954). For these writers, myth is a symbolic narrative that attempts to explain and give meaning to practices and beliefs. This conception is sensitive to the role of myth in ancient times but reflects a belief in the essentiality of myth within all cultures.

A mythic approach to news explores the news story as a symbolic narrative that attempts to give meaning to the events selected and described. A mythic approach might provide insight into the dramatic aspects of news stories about a terrorist victim. Faced with explaining the murder of a 69-year-old man in a wheelchair, journalists may have resorted, unconsciously or consciously, to myth. In turning to stories about the victim's widow, journalists may have been drawn to powerful myths in an attempt to explain or give meaning to events that seemed beyond meaning.

Research in Terrorism, News, and Myth

In studying news stories about terrorism, the researcher is aided by a rapidly growing body of work in the academic and popular press. Two book-length studies summarize recent research and contain excellent bibliographies of the literature: *Terrorism, the Media and the Law*, edited by Abraham H. Miller (1982), and *Violence as Communication*, by Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf (1982). A more recent bibliography, which gives special attention to news, is the *Terrorism and the News Media Research Bibliography*, compiled by Robert G. Picard and Rhonda S. Sheets (1986). Proceedings from a number of conferences on the media and terrorism also are of interest. These include *Terrorism and the Media* and *Terrorism and the Media in the 1980s*, both sponsored in part by the Institute for Studies in International Terrorism (1977; 1983). The 1986 symposium report, *Terrorism and the Media*, published by the Overseas Press Club (1986) is an excellent, current source. Many articles in the academic press have been devoted to terrorism and the media. Of particular interest is a rhetorical study of terrorist coverage by Dowling (1986), a study of audience effects from terrorist press coverage by Weimann (1982), and a content analysis of differences in terrorist coverage between the New York *Times* and the *Times* of London by Kelly and Mitchell (1981). The explosion of literature on terrorism and the media is evidence of the urgency of the topic and offers encouragement for further study.

A smaller but no less exciting array of work can be found devoted to news and myth. Among the noteworthy studies are: a discussion by Sykes (1970) of how myth and news communicate abstract ideas in simple, concrete form; a study by Smith (1979) of mythic narratives in television news; a mythic analysis of Canadian press coverage by Knight and Dean (1982), who show news developing abstractions of expertise and legitimacy; and a discussion by Bennet (1980) of myth, ritual, and political communication. A monograph by Breen and Corcoran (1982), "Myth in the Television Discourse," is of interest to this study. One of the functions of myth, the authors say, is to create models for society by translating one person's life history into an archetype for others. Later sections of this paper will suggest that a similar process occurs within the media portrayal of the victim and his widow.

Three studies have applied mythic analyses to studies of news and terrorism. Lawrence and Timberg (1979) suggest that the selection and presentation of terrorist news coverage is strongly affected by myth. Davis and Walton (1983) find mythic aspects of consensus and closure in international coverage of the terrorist killing of Italian premier Aldo Moro. Paletz, Ayanian, and Fozzard (1982) conclude that mythic aspects of television news provide attention but not legitimation for terrorists.

It is of great interest that communication researchers have started to apply mythic analyses to the study of news and terrorism. Although still beginning, the exploration of mythic content and structure surely can add to understanding of the selection, presentation, and possible effects of news stories about terrorism. Through a mythic study of news portrayals of a victim of terrorism—portrayals that focused on the victim's widow—this paper hopes to contribute to that important work.

The purpose of this paper is to study, from the perspective of drama, an elite newspaper's coverage of the family of the terrorist victim, Leon Klinghoffer. The paper will attempt to determine the amount of coverage given to the family. How much coverage did the widow receive and what was the nature of the coverage? The paper will study the dramatic aspects of the stories, including a categorization of acts, actors, settings, and themes. Using a definition of myth as a symbolic narrative that attempts to explain or give meaning to practices and beliefs, the paper will offer a preliminary comparison of the news stories with myth. It will explore the possibility that the power and fascination of news stories about Leon Klinghoffer stemmed from highly dramatic portrayals of his widow, portrayals deeply rooted in myth. Finally, the paper will consider the implications for public policy of possible mythic portrayals of terrorism in the news.

The microscopic nature of the study certainly is acknowledged; it isolates one aspect of one newspaper's coverage of one terrorist act. But in the attempt to probe beneath the surface of written accounts, interpretive research is forced to consider the minutiae of symbolic forms. Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 28) says of interpretive studies, "The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics." Through the complex specifics of newspaper stories about a widow, this paper hopes only to provide some consideration of possible mythic aspects of news coverage of terrorism, and provide a ground for preliminary discussion of the implications of mythic portrayals of terrorism for public policy. The paper will address the following research questions:

1) What was the extent of news coverage about the family and widow of Leon Klinghoffer? What was the location of such coverage in the paper? Did photographs accompany the coverage?

2) From a dramatic perspective, what were the acts, actors, and settings of news coverage of the Klinghoffer family? What themes appear in the news stories?

3) To what extent can the news stories be compared to myth, defined as a symbolic narrative that attempts to explain or give meaning to practices and beliefs? Do the news stories offer explanations for the murder of Leon Klinghoffer? If so, in what ways? Do the news stories attempt to give meaning to the events? If so, in what ways?

4) What might possible mythic portrayals say about the relationship between terrorism and the news? How might possible mythic portrayals of terrorism in the news affect public policy?

Drama as Method

New York *Times* stories are selected for study. Cited by Merrill (1968) as one of the world's elite newspapers, the *Times* is the most widely read paper within the U.S. government (Weiss, 1974), and the most widely quoted newspaper (Gau, 1976). It is an invaluable paper for the study of U.S. news about international affairs. Besides these reasons of international influence, the *Times* is especially important for the dramatic considerations of this study because it is the "hometown" newspaper of the Klinghoffers, who lived on East 10th Street in Manhattan. The local angle of this

otherwise international story provided the *Times* with great justification to cover the victim and his family. For example, a photo of the Klinghoffers, accompanying a story about local people held hostage on the Achille Lauro, appeared on the front page of the *Times*, the day before the world learned of the murder.

The time period studied is October 8 to October 21, 1985. Although the hijacking took place over just two of these days, the story commanded coverage for two weeks because of the U.S. interception of the jet bearing the hijackers, and then the discovery and burial of Leon Klinghoffer's body.

The method of study is three-fold:

1) The first step is a content analysis of all *Times* stories related to the hijacking during the two-week period. For each day, the analysis notes the number of stories whose main subject is the Klinghoffer family, the page number of the story, and whether a photograph accompanies the story. The general theme of each news story, such as daughters' anxiety or widow's grief, is briefly noted.

2) With the basic accounting established of the amount of news coverage given the Klinghoffer family, the second method then analyzes each story, attempting to draw out its symbolic, dramatic aspects. The method is a dramatistic analysis, based on the work of Kenneth Burke. Although Burke can be read as a theoretician of drama, he was adamant that drama provided a methodological key to the study of symbolic action. "Dramatism is *a method of analysis*," Burke wrote (1968, p. 445), "and a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives *is via a methodological inquiry* into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions" (my emphasis).

Burke's method begins by breaking down a story into its essential dramatic elements. These elements form a pentad: actors, acts, scenes, purposes, and agencies. Thus, each news story about the Klinghoffers is examined through each element of the pentad.

Actors. The analysis isolates and identifies all characters in the news story. How is the individual actor described by the story? Does the actor appear to represent a larger entity such as a nation, religious group, government agency, or the public? Actors are also identified by predicate and function. What role does the actor play?

Act. Dramatism pays careful attention to the portrayal of action. The choice of words used to describe an individual action is studied. For example, the distinction is noted between "said" and "claimed," or "killed" and "slaughtered." The pattern of action within each news story—the plot—is examined for its logic and assumptions, origins and conclusions.

Scenes. The analysis notes the setting of the news story. How is the scene described by the story—friendly or forbidding, foreign or familiar? Does the scene play a role in the action? If so, in what way? Is the individual scene placed in a larger, global context?

Purposes. Dramatism studies the motivations and intentions of the actors. The analysis notes whether these purposes have been expressed by actors or offered by the news story. Does the story portray the purposes in positive, negative, or neutral terms, or not at all?

Agencies. The study examines the means, tools, and channels that the actors use to pursue their intentions. Are the agencies effective and successful? Does the news story portray the agencies in positive, negative, or neutral terms, or not at all?

Dramatistic analysis provides a means for the detailed consideration and categorization of the integral elements of a news story. It is an attempt to organize and make plain the structure and content of a text. It is particularly apt for news analysis. Besides its sensitivity to possible dramatic aspects in news, dramatism offers an intriguing comparison between the elements of the pentad and the traditional five Ws and H: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

The organization of the dramatic elements of the story may also appear similar in approach to the structuralist "reconstruction" of a text (Levi-Strauss, 1967; Barthes, 1957). But structuralists isolate acts, actors, settings, and plots in an effort to expose internal patterns of association and opposition; structuralists seek meaning not from outside the story but only from the relation of elements within the story. Burke would never deny the story a response to a situation or a world. Burke's analysis examines the latent content and structure of the text not to subsume the meaning of the individual story but to understand more fully the meaning of the individual story.

3) The third methodological step is the examination of patterns of portrayals *among* individual news stories. The categories of actors, acts, scenes, purposes, and agencies are studied for recurring images. No hunt for a fleeting reference in a forgotten paragraph, the analysis looks for obvious patterns among symbols and themes, what Hugh Duncan (1962, p. 146) might call "the observable data of sociation, namely expressive symbols." It is here that the question of myth arises. The analysis asks the extent to which the patterns of portrayals in the news stories can be

compared to myth, defined as a symbolic narrative that attempts to explain or give meaning to practices and beliefs. From the news stories of his family, can a narrative be found that attempts to explain or give meaning to the death of Leon Klinghoffer?

In summary, the paper attempts to explore, in a preliminary fashion, possible mythic aspects of terrorist news coverage by examining news portrayals of the terrorist victim Leon Klinghoffer, concentrating particularly on stories about his family and widow. The story of the victim's widow is powerful and complex; the method of study combines traditional content analysis with dramatistic analysis in an attempt to fully examine the amount and nature of New York *Times* coverage of the widow. The paper explores the possibility that news stories about Leon Klinghoffer focused on highly dramatic portrayals of his widow in an attempt to offer the comfort, order, meaning, and understanding of myth in response to the threat and challenge of terrorism.

Amount of News Coverage

In the first week of the hijacking, the *Times* devoted a small but consistent number of stories to the Klinghoffer family. The basic content analysis showed at least one story a day appeared in the *Times* about the family. It has already been noted that a front-page story, with accompanying photograph, was published about the Klinghoffers on October 9, even before word of the killing. On October 13, when Marilyn Klinghoffer returned to the United States, four stories were devoted to her and her family.

Page number and accompanying photographs were noted in the analysis. As seen in Table 1, the page numbers and photographs suggest the prominence of the Klinghoffer stories in the *Times*. The Klinghoffer family appeared on the front page on four of the first seven days of the hijacking coverage. Mrs. Klinghoffer's photograph appeared on the front page of the *Times* three times, more than any other person that week. Out of the many personalities involved in the events of that week—personalities including the hijackers, the President of the United States, the ship captain, and Leon Klinghoffer himself—it is of some interest that the victim's widow received such prominence in the *Times*.

TABLE 1

NEW YORK TIMES STORIES ABOUT THE LEON KLINGHOFFER FAMILY

Date	Number of stories	Page number	Photo (page)	Theme
Oct. 8, 1985	—	—	—	—
Oct. 9	2	A1, A10	1 (A1)	daughters' anxiety
Oct. 10	1	A1, A10, A14	3 (A10, A14)	daughters' grief
Oct. 11	2	A1, A13	1 (A1)	widow's grief victim as heroic victim as loving man
Oct. 12	1	A8	—	victim as happy man victim as loving man
Oct. 13	4	A1, A24, A26	1 (A1)	widow's grief widow's rage widow's strength
Oct. 14	—	—	—	—
Oct. 15	—	—	—	—
Oct. 16	—	—	—	—
Oct. 17	—	—	1 (A1)	victim as hero
Oct. 18	—	—	1 (A10)	victim as hero
Oct. 19	—	—	—	—
Oct. 20	—	—	—	—
Oct. 21	1	A1, A6	1 (A1)	victim as symbol of good
Oct. 22	1	A10	1 (A10)	victim as symbol of good

Analysis of the second week of the hijacking coverage showed that coverage of the Klinghoffer family dropped off sharply after the intense coverage of the widow's return to New York. Mrs. Klinghoffer secluded herself in her apartment. And with the remaining hostages freed and the hijackers in custody, the Achille Lauro story was losing its news interest. Even when a body washed ashore in Syria, and steps were taken to positively identify the remains, the

Klinghoffer family was not mentioned in the *Times*. But when Mrs. Klinghoffer came out of seclusion to receive her husband's body at the airport, she appeared in a front-page story and photograph. On the following day, accompanied by a mayor, governor, and two U.S. Senators, the widow buried her husband. And her slumped shoulders and wavering steps were recorded by the *Times*.

The primary themes of the narratives, as seen in Table 1, reveal the entire process of sorrow and grief captured by the *Times*. The initial anxiety of the daughters provided the theme for the first story. The following day, anxiety gave way to horror and grief. When coverage settled upon Mrs. Klinghoffer, the story themes became the mourning and then the eulogizing of her husband. These themes and stories will be treated in more detail in the following section, but it is important to note that the full chain of sorrow—from anxiety to burial—has been portrayed by the *Times*.

Table 2 summarizes the more descriptive, dramatistic analysis of the news stories about the Klinghoffer family. The breakdown of each story into its elements revealed the highly dramatic nature of the narratives. Primary characters always were the family members, the widow and her daughters. Highly placed public officials, even President Ronald Reagan, were given minor roles in these stories.

TABLE 2

DRAMATISTIC CATEGORIZATION OF NEW YORK TIMES STORIES ABOUT THE LEON KLINGHOFFER FAMILY

Date (#/stories)	**Actors** Who	**Act** What	**Scene** When	Where	**Purpose** Why	**Agency** How
Oct. 9, 1985	two daughters	awaiting word	night before father's death	parents' apartment	anxiety, love hopelessness	daughters tell stories; talk to reporters
Oct. 10	two daughters	receive word of father's death	the moment they receive word	parents' apartment	horror, grief	daughters scream; daughters observed
Oct. 11 (1)	widow	attempts to leave ship	as she leaves ship	Port Said, Egypt	despair	widow observed
Oct. 11 (2)	widow	tells daughters father a hero	widow's first phone call home	outside apartment	victim as hero	widow calls daughters; family tells reporters
Oct. 12	family	awaits widow & eulogizes victim	as family awaits widow	parents' apartment	victim as hero & loving man	relatives tell stories; talk to reporters
Oct. 13 (1)	widow	returns to U.S.	her return	airport	despair	widow observed
Oct. 13 (2)	widow	returns to U.S.	her return	airport	despair	widow observed
Oct. 13 (3)	widow	speaks to President	after return home	parents' apartment	widow's rage	widow tells President; family tells reporters
Oct. 13 (4)	widow	speaks to President	after return home	parents' apartment	widow's rage	widow tells President; family tells reporters
Oct. 21	widow	husband's body returned	as she meets the body	airport	victim as symbol of good	widow observed; politicians speak
Oct. 22	widow & family	burying victim	service & burial	synagogue & graveyard	victim as symbol of good	widow observed; rabbi speaks

The focus of the stories was the close depiction of grief, with little emphasis on public and political aspects of events. Thus, the acts—the actions and plot—usually centered on a private, crucial moment: word of death, return of the body, burial of the man. The scenes always heightened the intimacy of the act. The *Times* seemed to be present at the site and time of tragedy. In most stories about the Klinghoffers, a *Times* reporter was on the scene—in the living room of the apartment, at the Achille Lauro, at the airport, at the graveyard.

The purposes, intentions, and motivations of the actors were deeply personal and sharply drawn; through photographs and words, the anxiety, horror, sorrow, rage, and love of the Klinghoffers were made clear. The agencies—the channels by which actors voiced intentions or pursued purposes—were simple and sad expressions of human misery: the tears of a daughter dropping onto a photo album, or the hand of the widow touched to a flag-draped coffin. With each stark and terrible detail, the dramatistic analysis of the *Times* stories revealed the structure and the content of the narratives of grief.

Drama: Irony and Murder

On October 9, the Klinghoffers first appeared in the New York *Times*. A front-page story, headlined "To Hostage Families, Waiting Back Home Is Also a Nightmare," described the two daughters, Lisa and Ilsa, sitting by the telephone in their parents' Greenwich Village apartment. They had waited for news "all through the night Monday and all day Tuesday." Much family background was supplied. The daughters were particularly worried about their father, "who suffered a stroke several years ago that left him paralyzed on the right side and with slightly slurred speech." Despite his illness, Leon was a very active man, the daughters said, and he and his wife had greatly anticipated the cruise. They had celebrated their 36th wedding anniversary in September, and Lisa and Ilsa had given them luggage as a gift.

While they waited, the daughters tried "to comfort each other" with family jokes. "I can just picture Mommy telling Leon, 'Wait till we get back, they're not going to believe this,' " Ilsa told Lisa. The story ended with a quote from Ilsa's fiance. " 'They're O.K.,' he said. 'They're O.K. I just know it!' " Retrospect gives sad irony to the words. Retrospect also provides irony over the *Times*' choice to focus on this particular family to portray the anxiety of hostage relatives.

The next day's newspaper brought more drama: the death of Leon Klinghoffer. The lead story described the surrender of the hijackers and reported the killing of Klinghoffer. However, a second front-page story was devoted exclusively to an agonized, highly dramatic account of how the Klinghoffer family learned of the murder. Again, the *Times* reporter was on the scene, in the Greenwich Village apartment. The story began with a celebration—daughters, relatives, and friends were lifting champagne glasses, "about to toast their parents' deliverance." Then, the phone rang and the fiance answered. Lisa and Ilsa, the reporter noted, "did not at first notice how quiet he became." He put the phone down and told the women their father might be dead. "Their screams, heartbreaking after so much jubilation, filled the living room where their friends and relatives looked at each other in horror and disbelief."

Drama, in this story, was created purposefully by the reporter. Because readers already were aware from the lead story and headlines that Klinghoffer was dead, the family story became a tragedy of discovery. The skill of the reporter must be noted, as well as the good news sense or "good fortune," that placed the reporter in the Klinghoffer apartment at that time. Also noted, however, might be what Hulteng (1976, p. 164) calls the "uncomfortable voyeurism" into the lives of those thrust by tragedy into the news.

The dramatistic analysis makes note of patterns of portrayals. With the return on a second day to the actors and actions of the Klinghoffer family, a certain continuity of coverage was established. These people, even before the death of their loved one, had been chosen as a dramatic instrument. For the *Times*, the lead stories and reports on terrorism were not enough to convey the sense of the story. To more meaningfully interpret the chaotic events on the Mediterranean, the newspaper continued to follow the actions of two young women waiting for their parents in New York.

The next day, October 11, the news spotlight intensified on the Klinghoffers. No longer just one of the families affected by the Achille Lauro hijacking, the killing of Leon catapulted the family into international prominence. The *Times* ran two stories. On the front page, the scene had shifted to Port Said, Egypt, with a photograph of Marilyn Klinghoffer being escorted from the Achille Lauro. She was the face of tragedy. Her chin rested on her chest, and her eyes were sunk in dark circles. Her hair was wind blown and wild. In sad contrast to her mourning, she still wore a bright, floral, low-necked dress from her holiday cruise.

The accompanying story on the front page referred to itself as "a vivid account" of the killing of Leon Klinghoffer, taken from interviews with passengers. Yet at the end, the focus returned to Mrs. Klinghoffer, as it recounted "the most moving scene" when the widow came ashore. "She was wearing a white flower print dress and was utterly downcast," the story read. "She barely raised her eyes to look at the mob of reporters and cameramen who pushed and shoved their way around her. Finally, Mrs. Klinghoffer, looking disraught (*sic*) looked up and said, 'Get away.' " A most moving scene? Authorities eventually had to take Mrs. Klinghoffer back to the ship—where her husband had been murdered—to escape the media mob on shore.

Suggestion of Myth: Victim as Hero

Another story that same day, October 11, developed an important theme that would continue to appear throughout the *Times* treatment of the Klinghoffer family. The theme was the portrayal of the victim as good, innocent, and

heroic. The story was entitled, "Wife Calls Victim of Hijackers a Hero." It began with the words of the widow: "'Your father was a hero,' Marilyn Klinghoffer told her two daughters yesterday." The story was partially devoted to the widow's "first telephone call home" since the hijacking, as related by Mrs. Klinghoffer's son-in-law. However, after giving a few details of the call, the story launched into the portrayal of a heroic, virtuous victim. Leon Klinghoffer was described as a "determined man" who fought hard to recover from his stroke. The son-in-law called him "a devoted husband, a loving father and a good friend." A friend said, "He was an unbelievably gentle man." A neighbor testified, "He always smiled, and he'd say hello." And a niece was quoted: "All he talked about was family and love."

It was here that the first outlines of myth might be seen. The suggestion of myth lay in a defined pattern of expressive symbols within the news stories. As seen in Tables 1 and 2, patterns did emerge. The *Times* coverage of the Klinghoffer family more than provided an intimate depiction of family grief. Within accounts about the widow, the *Times* wove portrayals of the victim as good and heroic. Using the drama of the widow's grief, the *Times* offered Leon Klinghoffer as a symbol of the innocent victim sacrificed.

On the following day, October 12, the *Times* continued to explore the dramatic, heroic portrayal of the victim. A long story was headlined, "Aged Victim, Portrayed as Helpless, Is Recalled as a Strong, Happy Man." Again, the *Times* appeared to be comfortably settled in the living room of the Klinghoffer apartment. Relatives have gathered, and they "looked at photographs of him and his wife Marilyn and the children, and they laughed at small memories." The story noted that on a coffee table in the middle of the room was a wedding photograph of the widow, "a beautiful, dark-haired young woman in a traditional wedding gown." Absent from the scene, on her way home to the United States, the widow was still placed by the story at center stage.

With this scene set, the *Times* then began the story of the victim's life, starting with the almost archetypal introduction for U.S. heroes: "He struggled all of his life . . . to overcome his humble beginnings on the Lower East Side." The story furnished more testimony as to the character and humanity of the victim. "He was a contented, happy man," his mother-in-law said. "He loved his friends and family." His daughter provided a glimpse of the man, recalling his fondness for the television show "Dynasty." "'He was addicted to Dynasty,' Lisa said. 'Joan Collins—wow!'" The story itself took an active, direct part in the testimony. "Everyone in the family went to Leon for advice," the story said. And, "The entire family speaks of the courage with which Mr. Klinghoffer overcame two strokes several years ago."

The story also mentioned that President Reagan had telephoned and told the daughters that "their father was an American of whom everyone could be proud." An important dimension was added to the story with the inclusion of the President's words. By including the message, the story confirmed that the portrayal of Leon Klinghoffer as a heroic American was not solely a creation of the news story but was a view to be found in other areas of American public life. Dramatistic analysis of news must consider that news stories are symbolic expressions which create but also are created by culture.

The Widow

On Sunday, October 13, the *Times* coverage of the Klinghoffers climaxed with four stories—each centered upon the widow. Providing a graphic centerpiece for the narratives was a large, front-page photograph of Mrs. Klinghoffer arriving at Newark International Airport. The accompanying story described the scene: "Clad in black, staring straight ahead with a look of despair in her eyes," the widow was escorted to a limousine by two U.S. Senators and a Congressman—a reception befitting the widow of a hero.

Inside the paper, a second story provided another viewpoint of the widow's return home. This story contrasted the joy of other returning hostages with the gloom of Mrs. Klinghoffer. The others wore "cheerful pastel-colored cruise clothes;" the widow "wore a black shawl and black slacks." The other former hostages were united with relatives in a large, gay room, filled with people; Mrs. Klinghoffer met her daughters in a private room. "In one room was jubilation, in the other grief. The doors were kept closed. This part of the homecoming was private."

Two other stories kept the focus of the *Times* on the widow. Both stories involved a telephone call from President Reagan to the widow. One was a transcript of the conversation, "as taken down by the Klinghoffer family and provided to the New York *Times*." The family's willingness to contribute to the public nature of the widow's grief was remarkable. A relative recorded the words of the widow and the President, and then immediately made these words available to the press. The public face, to what might otherwise be a time of intimate mourning, reflected a kind of acknowledgment

or acceptance by the family of the dramatic, public nature of the death of the victim.

A related story used the phone conversation between the President and the widow to talk about the widow's love for her husband and her rage at his killers. The story recounted a powerful moment in the phone conversation. "These people don't deserve to live. They are despicable," Mrs. Klinghoffer told the President. "No," the President replied. The widow told the President she faced the hijackers in a police lineup in Italy and that she "spit in their faces." The President answered, "You did. Oh God bless you." After this vignette, the story then depicted the strength and presence of the widow herself. Family members said, "they were not just reassured, but awed, by the sight of her," the story reported. The fiance said, "'She's the bravest woman I've ever met.' " The story finished on a dramatic note: "With Marilyn Klinghoffer home, the mourning of Leon Klinghoffer could now begin."

With five straight days of stories about the victim and his widow, culminating with four accounts in the Sunday paper about the widow, the *Times* provided a complex, detailed, and highly dramatic portrayal of grief in its first week of coverage of the hijacking and murder. Through almost microscopic examination of the love, anger, and pain of the widow, the news stories depicted the virtues of the victim. Through the appearance in the stories of public figures including Senators, Congressmen, and the President, the portrayal was acknowledged as a public phenomenon, with the victim transformed, in the narratives, into a national symbol of heroism and innocence. If myth is defined as a symbolic narrative that attempts to explain practices or beliefs, the week's news stories in the *Times* about Leon Klinghoffer and his widow might to some extent be compared to myth.

"He Will Live in His Nation's Memory"

In the next week, the *Times* coverage of the Klinghoffers dropped dramatically. Even when the body of Leon Klinghoffer was found, the family was not questioned or mentioned. The theme of the heroic victim might be seen, however, in two photographs. On October 17, a photograph of Klinghoffer's coffin, carried by Syrian soldiers, appeared on the front page of the *Times*. The front-page prominence given to the coffin, along with the military involvement, suggested the victim was of international stature. The following day, a photograph of the Klinghoffers' daughters appeared in the newspaper. The women, continuing to maintain their public profile, held a press conference "announcing establishment of a fund to combat international terrorism in memory of Leon Klinghoffer."

On October 20, Leon Klinghoffer's body was returned to the United States. On October 21 and 22, the *Times* again devoted front-page scrutiny to the victim and his widow, and explicitly cited Klinghoffer as a national symbol of virtue and heroism. Accompanied by a front-page photograph of the widow and family standing beside the flag-covered coffin, the *Times* story, in its lead, made clear its symbolic intent: "While his widow wept, the mortal remains of Leon Klinghoffer were ceremoniously returned to his native city yesterday, and his memory was hailed by President Reagan and New York legislators as a symbol of innocence and goodness in a harsh world."

Within that one sentence, a number of the *Times'* dramatic portrayals and themes were neatly compressed. The sentence—the story—began with the focus trained on the widow. Before the President, before Leon Klinghoffer, the widow took the stage. "Mortal remains" suggested that other remains of the victim were immortal, which might refer to everlasting life or perhaps to the life of the victim in the nation's memory, both appropriate for a national hero. The presence in the story of the President and other legislators denoted the public stature of the victim, as did the reference to the ceremonious return. And finally, the victim was specifically hailed, by the officials and by the story, as a symbol of innocence and goodness; the symbolic narrative of the virtuous hero, of course, traditionally has been found in myth.

The body of the story continued to develop the same themes of goodness and heroism. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan called Klinghoffer "a symbol of righteousness in a world filled with evil and cruelty" and said the victim "will live in his nation's memory always for just those reasons." A statement from President Reagan proclaimed, "May Leon Klinghoffer's memory be a blessing to the world."

Through seven paragraphs, the story examined in minute detail the grief of the widow as she received her husband's body. "In dark glasses and a dark suit," she watched "impassively at first." Soon she "lifted her glasses and dabbed at her eyes." She "approached the coffin, put her hands to her lips and touched it." When the coffin was placed in the hearse, she "put her handkerchief to her face again." She was embraced and kissed by the dignitaries, and it "was then that she turned away and her body briefly sagged," but relatives supported her. Then, "escorted to a limousine, Mrs. Klinghoffer slumped bleak-faced in the rear seat."

Similar symbolic patterns—the heroic portrayal of the victim and the microscopic analysis of the widow's grief—appeared the following day in a *Times* story on the burial of Leon Klinghoffer. Headlined "Klinghoffer Eulogized as

Public and Private Hero," the story followed the body from services at a synagogue to the ceremonies at the graveyard. The narrative again made explicit its symbolic thrust: "From a father, husband and small-appliance manufacturer who lived his 69 years, for the most part, in relative obscurity, Mr. Klinghoffer has been transformed into an international hero and political symbol."

With this story, two weeks of *Times* coverage of the Klinghoffers came to an end. As the newspaper itself noted, a once-unknown man had become an international hero and political symbol. In the *Times*, this transformation took place through the convergence of two patterns: the microscopic examination of the widow's grief, and the portrayal of the victim as an innocent, heroic man. Dramatistic analysis of the *Times* stories has suggested that the news accounts can fruitfully be perceived as symbolic narratives that attempt to explain and give meaning to the events they portray. It has been suggested that, in this sense, the news stories might fruitfully be compared to myth. The following section will explore the notion of myth that might lie behind such stories, and discuss possible implications of mythic portrayals of terrorism for public policy.

Myth: The Sacrifice of the Hero

Through its stories on Leon Klinghoffer and his widow, the *Times* offered portrayals of the victim as a virtuous, heroic man who symbolized innocence and righteousness and whose death was cause for national mourning. Myth has been defined as a symbolic narrative that attempts to explain or give meaning to practices and beliefs, and the portrayals of Leon Klinghoffer, within the highly dramatic stories about his widow, certainly suggest the possibility of myth.

Indeed, the narrative of the death of the hero is one of the archetypal myths, found in cultures around the world. In "Ancient Myths and Modern Man," Joseph Henderson (Jung, 1964, p. 101) writes, "Over and over again one hears a tale describing a hero's miraculous but humble birth," his proof of great strength, his battle with evil, "and his fall through betrayal or a 'heroic' sacrifice that ends in his death." In the *Times* stories focusing on his widow, Klinghoffer is the mythic hero, who "struggled all of his life . . . to overcome his humble beginnings." In life, Klinghoffer was "an unbelievably gentle man." And, "all he talked about was family and love." In death, Klinghoffer was "a hero," and "an American of whom everyone could be proud." He was a "symbol of innocence and goodness in a harsh world," and a "symbol of righteousness in a world filled with evil and cruelty."

In Western cultures, the symbolic narrative of the heroic, innocent victim sacrificed to evil finds its most perfect expression in the myth of Jesus Christ. (In this meaning, "myth" makes no judgment on the *truth* of a story; myth is a symbolic narrative that attempts to extend meaning.) According to Carl Jung, the myth of Christ—the myth of the hero sacrificed—is of central importance to individuals. Jung said (1959a, p. 367), that the compelling aspect of the myth is that the image "is a symbol of the self." He theorized that the symbol of Christ, as the hero, was so powerful in Western cultures that the symbol must exemplify the self (1959b, p. 37). The thought was echoed by Jung's foremost disciple, Erich Neumann. In *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Neumann (1970, p. 380) states plainly that the hero is "the exemplar of individuality."

And so Leon Klinghoffer—portrayed within the myth of the sacrificed hero—becomes a symbol of the self in the pages of the *Times*. The myth may help explain the gripping nature of the media coverage of the terrorist victim and his family. From the words of the story may come the conscious or unconscious realization that the dramatic portrayal of the victim is the portrayal of *my-self*. The myth of the hero has meaning, Henderson says (Jung, 1964, p. 101), "both for the individual, who is endeavoring to discover and assert his personality, and for a whole society, which has an equal need to establish its collective identity." (Perhaps the myth also lies behind the terror of terrorism; the sacrificed hero could have been my-self. In terrorism, the sacrificed hero is innocent of all but coincidence.)

It is the demands of this mythic portrayal of the self that might explain the minute, dramatic depiction of the widow's grief within the news stories. Every bit of grounding, every device used to locate the victim as a real person in a specific time and place, better serves to portray him as an individual, an exemplar of the self. And so, the stories detail his humble beginnings, his job selling small appliances, his marriage, his battle to overcome strokes, his fondness for "Dynasty" and Joan Collins. And the stories examine each movement of the widow's grief: the handkerchief to the eye, the hand to the lip and then the coffin, the sag of her body, and the slump of her shoulders. This sacrifice is no fiction; the victim is a real person and it could have been my-self.

In their symbolic transformation of events to myth, of victim to self, the news stories build a detailed portrayal not unlike James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. The book is crammed with the staggering details of Leopold Bloom's life until

finally, the details collapse, and Bloom is revealed as the hero Ulysses, and Ulysses is revealed as the symbol of myself. In the same way, the *Times* stories provide details about the Klinghoffer family. "The nature of the hero is as manifold as the agonizing situations of real life," Neumann writes (1970, p. 378). "But always he is compelled to sacrifice normal living in whatever form it may touch him, whether it be mother, father, child, homeland, sweetheart, brother or friend."

The myth of the hero may also work with the examination of the grief of the widow to add another compelling aspect to the narratives. For if indeed the sacrificed hero is my-self, then the news allows me the privileged opportunity to attend my own death. The age-old question can be answered: What will it be like when I die? In a real way, through the myth of the hero and the symbol of the self, I can view the effect of my death and the testimony of my life. I see the grief of my widow as she touches my coffin and staggers in grief. My family and friends mourn my passing; I'm curious—who showed up? I share the outrage of the world that my life should have been cut short. Clergy, Senators, even the President testify to my worth; I was a symbol of righteousness, a blessing to the world. Even in the face of the meaninglessness of life that must end in death, symbolized so well by my meaningless victimage to terrorism, I can see that my life had meaning after all.

Faced with giving meaning to the murder of Leon Klinghoffer, faced with giving meaning to life in the face of death, the news stories have appealed to the power of myth. Perhaps only myth is capable of balancing the eternal opposition—what Freud (1961, p. 122) called the "battle of the giants":

> And now, I think, the meaning of the evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species.

Life and death struggle in the news stories. Invoking the great myth of the hero, the news stories seek to answer the terrorist negation which they report. Terrorism offers death, while the news stories offer life. Terrorism has said the self is meaningless, while the news stories of the hero's widow affirm that the self has meaning.

Implications: Myth, Terrorism, and Public Policy

Dramatistic analysis has suggested that New York *Times* portrayals of the terrorist killing of Leon Klinghoffer may contain a mythic dimension. Although the study has been quite small in scope and exploratory in approach, it may be beneficial to at least consider possible implications of mythic news portrayals of terrorist victims.

A primary implication already has been alluded to. Through the myth of the hero, the news stories invoked the symbol of the self, inviting intense identification of the individual reader with the terrorist victim. But in doing so, the news stories also provided the terror of terrorism. Symbolic expression, terrorism is an act of communication between the terrorists and an audience, which might be an individual, a nation, or a world. Much of the power of the terrorist statement lies in its symbolic aspects. Often unknown by their killers, the terrorist victims are meant to symbolically represent a nation, a religion, an institution. The terror—as opposed to disgust over the slaughter, or grief over the loss—resides in the personal realization that the victim is a symbol of the self as member of a nation or institution. Only coincidence, fate, timing, or happenstance places that particular member in the hands of the terrorist at that time. It could have been my-self, the symbol says.

The news stories that drew from the myth of the hero, that invoked the symbol of the self in response to terrorism, thus helped the terrorists establish the link between the victim and the self. On the surface level, the news accounts of the victim's widow informed the public of the circumstances and effects of the terrorist act. The violence and the sadness made for compelling reading. But on a deeper level, the mythic tale of the hero who was sacrificed to evil did much more than inform. The news stories invited intense identification of the reader with the victim, allowing real communication between the terrorist and individual members of the community. To the extent that media portrayals of terrorist victims continue to invoke the myth of the hero, especially through the powerful dramatization of family grief, the ability of terrorists to communicate with the community should remain strong.

The symbolism of terrorism was also aided by the actions of public officials—portrayed in the media. The involvement

of public officials with Marilyn Klinghoffer explicitly affirmed the myth of the hero portrayed in the media. The victim was the terrorists' symbol of the nation, and was so honored by the media, and mourned by officials. Actions of the government figures, portrayed by the media, thus also helped the terrorist establish symbolic expression with the national community. The recognition of the victim on national terms by public officials confirmed the symbolic aspect of the terrorist message.

However, policy makers may not always be mere pawns, reacting to terrorist manipulation. Without appearing too cynical, it is pertinent to note that acceptance of the mythic portrayal of the victim as hero allows politicians access to the media. For example, acceptance of the myth allowed politicians access to the power and drama surrounding the grief of Marilyn Klinghoffer. Much political gain might have been realized through embracing a widow on a public stage. (Conversely, it should also be noted that the media certainly benefited from the public interest in the dramatic stories of the victim and his widow. Mythic portrayals of terrorism may be a good example of the ways in which the media create and are also created by culture.)

Other political implications from news portrayals of the myth of the hero, and the mourning of the victim as a symbol of a nation or community, might be suggested. Policy makers can appeal to the power of the myth to arouse support for measures of prevention and reprisal. For example, restrictions on travel by U.S. citizens to areas of the Middle East were preventive measures based on perceived dangers faced by individual U.S. citizens. The restrictions recognized the symbolism of terrorism—each individual was qualified to serve as a symbol of the nation for terrorists.

Mythic images in the news might also help public officials create a powerful climate for revenge. An attack against an individual citizen can be recognized by the media, politicians, and the public as an attack against the nation. For example, on April 14, 1986, U.S. air and naval forces bombed Libya. In a speech that night, President Reagan (1986) said the attack was a direct response to terrorism against U.S. citizens. "I warned Colonel Khadafy that we would hold his regime accountable for any new terrorist attacks launched against American citizens," the President said. "When our citizens are abused or attacked anywhere in the world on the direct orders of a hostile regime, we will respond so long as I'm in this Oval Office." Without considering the wisdom of the bombings or the possible "effects" of news stories, it can at least be suggested that mythic portrayals of terrorist victims in the news might help create or sustain a climate that allows the bombing of a city in response to the taking of an American life.

The microscopic approach of this study prevents any attempt at linking news coverage to aspects of social life. The nature of the study also prohibits generalizing from its analysis to other newspapers or to other terrorist incidents. Much preliminary work needs to be done on the relationship among the media, terrorism, and myth, and their relation to public policy. This study hopes at least to offer consideration of possible mythic portrayals of terrorism in the news. Perhaps news stories not only provide information on terrorism to a society but also, through the dramatic portrayal of symbols, give meaning to that society's practices and beliefs. Perhaps then, in such situations, news can be read as myth.

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Terrorism and the News Media Research Project
Emerson College
100 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116
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PROJECT DIRECTORS

Robert G. Picard
Emerson College
Lowndes (Rick) Stephens
University of South Carolina